

Report of the
Adult Learning Task Force

Submitted to
Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco

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I. INTRODUCTION

The State of Louisiana is faced with numerous economic and quality of life challenges:

- A. The proportion of families living in poverty is second only to Mississippi, as shown in Figure 1 (see figures in Appendix A).
- B. Per capita income is among the lowest in the country (Figure 2).
- C. The state has the lowest ranking of all states on the national health index (Figure 3).
- D. Its economy is heavily based on low-skill, low-wage jobs (Figure 4).
- E. Its economy is attracting low-skill workers and failing to retain those completing four-year degrees (Figure 5). This economy also is exhibiting a demand for more skilled workers that is being served only partially.

These conditions are directly connected with low education attainment levels of the state's adult population (Figures 6 and 7).

- F. Louisiana ranks low at all levels of education attainment (Figure 8).
- G. There are 600,000 citizens of Louisiana ages 18-64 who have not finished high school—more than one-fifth of the population in this age group. Of this group, 137,000 have less than a ninth grade education.
- H. The majority of participants served with funds received by the Department of Education for Adult Education Services is out-of-school youth, and the largest amount of funds expended is directed toward that large number of adults who have completed ninth grade but not yet received a high school diploma or GED.
- I. Louisiana has a very leaky education pipeline (Figure 9).
 - Of 100 9th graders, only 56 finish high school in four years.
 - Of those 56, 33 begin college.
 - Of those 33, only 12 finish a college program within six years.

The Task Force has concluded that Louisiana cannot achieve economic and quality of life benefits for its citizens commensurate with the norms of the nation without significant improvement in the education attainment levels of the adult population and without addressing the mismatch between occupations in demand and worker training.

II. GOALS

In recognition of the worrisome conditions confronting the state and the importance of education of adults in addressing these challenges, the Task Force has concluded that clear goals regarding improving the education of adults must be adopted and pursued. Specific goals are framed within the context of the following overarching goal:

That adults in every community in Louisiana will have easy access to, and benefit from, a comprehensive, high quality delivery system of continuing adult education and literacy programs designed to help all Louisianans reach their full potential as workers, family members, and citizens in a rapidly changing world. Further, that adults should avail themselves of this system as appropriate throughout their lives.

The more specific goals recommended for adoption include:

- A. That, within five years, Louisiana will double the number of adults certified annually as “workplace ready” as determined using the ACT’s WorkKeys Assessment, and within 10 years quadruple this number.
- B. That, within five years, Louisiana will double the number of adults who become pre-WorkKeys ready, and within 10 years quadruple this number.
- C. That, by the year 2020, Louisiana be ranked no lower than 25th among the states in the proportion of its working age population (age group 18-64) that:
 - Has completed at least a high school education.
 - Has attained an associate degree.
 - Has attained a baccalaureate degree or higher.
- D. That education is recognized as the key to improving the economic security and quality of life conditions for all citizens of the state and that the public secondary and postsecondary education systems, private education system, and faith-based communities are expected to (and do) contribute responsively and responsibly to:
 - Economic development
 - Reduction in poverty
 - Improvements in health of Louisiana’s citizens
 - Reduction in rates of incarceration and of recidivism.
- E. That a “system” for delivery of adult learning programs (from basic literacy through postsecondary education) and of the related support services be developed in such a way that transitions for learners are made as easily as possible, that this system be

accessible to citizens in each parish of the state, and that an appropriate communications structure be imbedded in the system to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

F. That these learning opportunities be made economically accessible to non-traditional adult learners—e.g., working poor parents, youth in secondary labor markets, etc.

G. That the culture of the state of Louisiana become one in which:

- Adults/learners recognize the importance of life-long learning and engage in formal and informal learning activities whenever they seek to improve some aspect of their lives.
- Employers expect their employees to have high levels of skills and encourage them to continue learning throughout their adult lives.

III. OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS REGARDING EDUCATION OF ADULTS

As support for the deliberations of the Task Force, representatives of CAEL and SREB collected information about:

- Programs through which adult learning and supporting services are being delivered.
- The policies and procedures that affect the operation of these programs.

There was a great deal of detailed information developed during the course of these activities. Primary findings are as follows:

- A. There are a large number of (independent and uncoordinated) activities and programs that are in one way or another intended to address adult learning in Louisiana.
- The Department of Education served nearly 50,000 students in three programs aimed at out-of-school youth and/or adults. These include the Adult Education and Family Literacy program (48,414), the Even Start Program (900) and the Jobs for America's Graduates (438).
 - The Louisiana Department of Labor served over 8,000 adults in two major programs funded by the federal government: the Workforce Investment Act Title I-B (Adult) and Title I-B (Dislocated Worker). In addition, the Department of Labor manages the Title I-B Youth program (5,742 participants) and the Registered Apprenticeship program, which had 3,426 participants in FY04.
 - The Louisiana Economic Development Department runs the Economic Development Customized Training Fund, which served 1,517 individuals working in new companies in the state in FY04.
 - The Department of Social Services provides two education programs aimed at adults: Vocational Rehabilitation, which served over 22,000 individuals in

FY04; and the STEP program, which targets individuals on public cash assistance (approximately 4,860 served on average per month).

- The Department of Corrections, through its “Adult Education and Vocational Training” program, served a monthly average of 4,431 adult inmates of the 15,297 eligible to participate in FY04, with 433 receiving their GED and 1,987 receiving a vocational-technical diploma or certificate; with an additional monthly average of 1,868 waiting to enroll in an education program.
- The Louisiana Workforce Commission oversaw two major certification programs: Industry-Based Certifications (16,120 recipients) and Work Ready certificates (3,200). Work Ready certificates are based on the ACT WorkKeys assessments.
- Louisiana’s colleges and universities, which provide a variety of adult learning programs including basic skills enhancement, preparation for job entry, and continuing professional/technical development. Current data systems do not capture institutional activities in these areas on a systematic basis.

In spite of the array of programs, the numbers of individuals being served successfully is small relative to the (minimally 600,000) adults who could benefit from adult learning programs.

B. Adult learning has not been a priority of the state of Louisiana.

- Most of the programs dealing with adult education are federal programs being administered by multiple state agencies.
- Fiscal support from the state is no more than that required to obtain federal funds.
- There are no financial aid funds available to support needy part-time adult learners.

C. Because adult education has not been a priority of the state, it also has not become a priority of any part of the education enterprise.

- While there are many dedicated individuals working hard on this issue within the Department of Education, the adult education programs are outside the mainstream of an agency focused on (in-school) education of youth rather than the (post-schooling) learning of adults.
- The part of the postsecondary education system that is best positioned to contribute to solutions of the problem of adult learning deficiencies—LCTCS, and especially LTC—is only minimally engaged. This sector views its role as serving adults who have successfully completed high school. Funding mechanisms from the state reinforce this perspective.

No component of the state's education apparatus has adult learning as a high priority.

D. Because the funding for many adult education programs comes from federal sources:

- The programs are managed in accordance with the requirements of funder guidelines rather than a comprehensive approach to address adult learning needs in Louisiana.
- Adherence to program guidelines contributes to the “splintered” delivery of programs and services.
- There is no capacity to move funds across programmatic lines—from programs that are undersubscribed (such as incumbent worker training) to those that have too little capacity to meet demand (such as ABE programs in correctional facilities).

Louisiana does not provide sufficient resources (beyond those required to match federal program funds) to allow Louisiana to establish its own priorities and utilize federal funds as allowable within the larger scheme.

E. The nature of funding for adult learning programs—not just the amounts, but the conditions under which it is distributed and utilized, creates a strong focus on running programs. The system is not designed to start with the needs of an individual and utilize a pool of resources to create a tailored set of appropriate services.

F. While significant progress has been made at improving elementary, secondary and higher education under the leadership of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and Board of Regents, there is no entity in Louisiana charged with providing leadership in addressing problems of adult learning. What is everybody's business has become nobody's business. There are several consequences to this lack of leadership, exacerbated by the nature of the funding flows:

- There is no entity empowered to articulate goals for improvement that transcend the goals established in the context of myriad individual programs.
- There are no comprehensive data systems in place to monitor progress toward the kinds of state goals proposed above or to provide a factual basis for defining the population to be served. Existing data systems have been designed primarily to demonstrate compliance with federal program requirements.
- A great deal of time and energy is being devoted to meetings dealing with issues that require solutions that can't be resolved within the domain of any single program manager. It must also be noted that these meetings occur at the implementation level. There is no device for bringing together leaders of the departments dealing with K-12 education, postsecondary education, workforce development, human services, economic development, corrections, etc. to deal with adult learning at the policy level.

- G. Overall lack of funding, proprietary attachments to a variety of funding streams and lack of leadership for the adult education agenda has led to a set of circumstances in which:
- Turf issues abound.
 - There is an underlying lack of knowledge about, and confidence in, each other's work.
 - Problems and issues get resolved at a micro level but without policy-level determinations.
- H. There is a (dysfunctional) split between literacy and vocational skills education. In discussions with the Task Force, there was a general consensus that:
- Most adults seek further education to further their economic goals—they are seeking skills related to employment.
 - Learners often need literacy skills but seldom seek these skills unless directly connected to more tangible workplace skills.
 - The best approach to adult education combines the learning of literacy and vocational skills.
- I. While there is some evidence of programs and services in postsecondary education that might be deemed “adult friendly” (e.g., accelerated program offerings, use of distance learning, credit articulation), these are too few in number.
- J. Employers are too disconnected from activities that yield improved education attainment of the adult workforce. While they stand to benefit greatly from a more skilled workforce, they are not using their position as employer as effectively as they might to:
- Make demonstration of competence at appropriate skill levels a condition of hiring.
 - Encourage acquisition of additional skills among their incumbent workers.

Educators can **push** the need for more education in adult populations, but these efforts will serve little purpose unless employers **pull** workers into education by making education a priority for employment and success in the workplace. Only then will individuals have the incentive to invest their time in their own futures.

K. Louisiana has some unique assets that, if used effectively, can provide great opportunities in advancing the cause of adult education. Seven in particular are worthy of note:

1. Resources and the commitment of several state agencies that make WorkKeys testing and job profiling widely available in the state—more so than in any other state in the country. This provides the capacity to use an assessment instrument that is workplace-oriented rather than school-oriented as a device for:
 - Assessing learning progress.
 - Providing an alternative to the GED as demonstration of ability to benefit from subsequent postsecondary education.
 - Providing employers benchmarks for assessing prospective and incumbent workers' skills for a specific job.

The fact that WorkKeys certification is portable and can serve to indicate preparation for specific occupations makes this opportunity special.

2. The Louisiana Work Ready Certificate, based on WorkKeys, is a portable credential that signifies to an employer that an individual has achieved acceptable levels in the foundation skills necessary for success in the workplace.
3. The state has licensed Profile XT, an all-purpose assessment package that measures individual qualities including thinking-style and reasoning, occupational interests, and behavioral traits. It can be used for placement, promotion, self-improvement, coaching, succession planning, and job description.
4. A well-developed (and still improving) telecommunications capacity that could be harnessed to deliver education to adults:
 - In all parts of the state.
 - At times and places that fit the needs of their busy lives making learning more accessible and convenient.
5. School districts that operate 600 sites around the state at which adult basic education opportunities are provided. The emphasis at those sites is on education aimed at individuals with academic skills at less than the ninth grade level.
6. The LTC system that has campuses, with student support services, distributed broadly across the state. The LTC could contribute massively to:
 - Addressing adult literacy issues.
 - Moving individuals from outside the postsecondary education mainstream into it.

That is, if their mission was explicitly expanded to cover such education and the funding mechanism reflected this expansion.

7. An array of public four year colleges and universities that provide workforce-related programs and services that generally are non-credit offerings and thus not reported in any formal way through existing data collection processes.

IV. CRITERIA FOR A RESPONSE

If Louisiana is going to move beyond the current state of affairs and deal with adult learning in a much expanded and more meaningful way, it will be necessary to:

- A. Establish a clear point of leadership for the adult education agenda. The entity designated should be:
 - One that is focused on policy and leadership of an agenda rather than an agency that operates programs.
 - One that can provide policy leadership at all levels of adult learning, not just precollegiate.
 - Capable of working across a variety of cabinet departments to create a coordinated approach to dealing with adult learning.
 - Engaged with employers to better understand their training requirements.

There are multiple possibilities that could work, among them the Board of Regents, the Workforce Commission, the Governor's Workforce Enterprise Team, or a newly created entity.

- B. Charge this entity with developing clear, explicit and measurable goals regarding adult learning.
- C. Measure success by demonstrating learning/competence. The approach should be outcome—not process or activity—based.
- D. Create focus across disparate providers and programs by utilizing incentives rather than regulation or sanctions.
- E. Design the system of program delivery so that the full array of needed programs and services:
 - Can be delivered to all parts of the state.
 - Utilize the capacities of adult learning providers located throughout the state as points of support services and entry into the system.
 - Utilize technology to complement, expand or to reach targeted populations.

- F. Emphasize linkages between literacy and vocational/technical skills, especially skills related to the state's highest demand occupations.
- G. Emphasize transitions in the educational/work pipeline that make learning, both formal and informal, a lifelong endeavor.
- H. Include the perspective of the adult learner in devising strategies and responses to the adult learning needs of the state.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force envisions an adult learning system for Louisiana in which adults in each parish:

- Have an easily accessible point of entry to educational programs and support services appropriate to their needs.
- Are helped to succeed in their learning endeavors.
- Are helped to develop a portfolio of lifelong learning experiences and credentials.
- Can draw on the educational resources of all the education providers in the state of Louisiana.
- Have their level of learning certified in ways that ease their transitions to the next levels of education and improve their employability.

In order to achieve this vision, the Task Force makes the following recommendations:

- A. That an Adult Learning Policy Council be established with membership comprised of the chief executives (no substitutes) of entities deemed appropriate by the Governor. This Council should be charged with:
 1. Articulating a clear set of goals for adult learning (see section II for a starting point) and developing strategies for reaching these goals.
 2. Creating a mechanism for monitoring progress toward the achievement of those goals—and making data readily available through a user-friendly medium. The measures should be commonly defined across all programs so that the results can be compared and program contributions to goal achievement measured.
 3. Developing and broadly distributing an annual report card that describes progress being made and compares Louisiana to other states on a set of key indicators.
 4. Developing coordinated policy regarding adult learning.
 5. Receiving new state dollars for purposes of enhancing adult learning and allocating those dollars in ways that will leverage current program funds to the maximum extent possible.

6. Recommending to the Governor a strategy for institutionalizing the work of the Council and ensuring the sustainability of the policy leadership with which it is charged.
- B. The Adult Learning Policy Council should not immediately promote action designed to restructure the existing mechanisms for delivering adult learning programs. Rather, it should:
1. Establish goals for improvement in every parish of the state.
 2. Designate a lead entity in each parish responsible for:
 - Establishing local goals in consultation with the Policy Council.
 - Coordinating efforts of various providers to achieve these goals.
 - Monitoring and reporting on performance.
 3. Utilize and encourage both public and private providers.
 4. Restructure the delivery system, if necessary, to reach performance goals based upon a rigorous evaluation after three years if the proposed approach is not successful.
- C. Take advantage of the state's commitment to and investment in ACT's WorkKeys and use that instrument as the primary mechanism for measuring competence and easing transitions among various education providers and into the world of work. This means that it will be important to:
1. Assess entrants into adult learning programs, using WorkKeys readiness assessments as appropriate, to determine whether or not individuals are ready to take core WorkKeys assessments.
 2. Use ability to pass WorkKeys readiness assessments as an indicator of successful completion of ABE programs.
 3. Devise a WorkKeys profile that will be broadly accepted (as an alternative to a high school diploma or GED) as a determinant of eligibility for entrance to the LCTCS. This, in essence, would require profiling "Freshman Year in LCTCS" to establish levels of basic skills (general education) required for successful participation.
 4. Provide WorkKeys certifications for individuals completing programs designed to prepare them for specific occupations.
 5. Provide learners with ACT WorkKeys job profiles in the area of their career interest to use in setting goals for their basic skills attainment.

6. Provide promotional materials and dissemination of information about WorkKeys to learners and employers across the state.
 7. Promote the utilization of WorkKeys by employers through:
 - Engaging employers in determining levels of skills needed by their employees.
 - Communicating the importance of utilizing WorkKeys to ensure that employees have these skills.
 - Promoting broad adoption and utilization by employers.
 8. Provide colleges and universities with ACT WorkKeys job profiles in the areas of career education and training they provide to use in setting goals for the basic skills attainment of the students in those programs.
- D. Formally expand the mission of the LCTCS to encompass adult learning programs for individuals who can pass the WorkKeys readiness assessment but who do not yet meet the WorkKeys profile required for successful LCTCS participation. In essence, this encourages LCTCS to provide the equivalent of developmental education to students who have not completed high school. LCTCS should be supported in this effort by adjustments in current state funding formulae.
- E. More fully engage employers in creating greater demand for adult learning and work-ready certification. Specifically the Task Force recommends that:
1. State government, as an employer, take the lead in promoting literacy for all its employees. This should include:
 - Profiling state positions (at least those with large numbers of employees against WorkKeys criteria).
 - Using WorkKeys as an assessment device for all potential new employees.
 - Providing training (during the work day) that will assist all existing employees to achieve the appropriate WorkKeys levels for the position they currently hold or wish to obtain. If there are state positions requiring skills at less than a high school level, skills associated with entry to LCTCS should be the target.
 2. State government encourage all other public sector employers—school districts, parish governments, etc.—to follow suit. For those entities receiving state funds, require an annual report indicating:
 - Number of employees falling below the skill level threshold of profiled jobs at the beginning of the year.

- Number of employees who have achieved the level during the course of the year.
 - Number of employees below “standard” at the end of the year.
3. Incentives be created for private sector employers to:
- Require appropriate demonstration of competence in the hiring process.
 - Increase literacy levels of current workers.

Tax credits provide one mechanism for accomplishing this. Another is to make direct payments to employers for increasing (using WorkKeys in a pretest/posttest mode) learning among their employees.

4. Promotional materials and dissemination of information about work-ready certification be provided to employers throughout the state.
- F. Allocate additional state resources for support of adult learning programs and services to be used to make adult education a truly comprehensive statewide program rather than an aggregation of federal programs. These resources should be allocated by the Policy Council to such purposes as:
1. Providing the policy leadership entity with funds to be used to make adult education truly a state program rather than an aggregation of federal programs.
 2. Creating points of entry to adult learning services at all educational levels in all parishes.
 3. Enhancing the capacity of LCTCS to provide adult literacy education to adults who have passed WorkKeys readiness assessments but have not demonstrated skill levels that would prepare them for successful postsecondary education participation. This can be done as a program investment early in the process (e.g., to support Literacy Labs) or on a performance basis after the capacity is created.
 4. Establishing a financial aid program designed to meet the needs of adults, particularly those who are part-time learners and who have financial need. Alternatively, this could include a learner incentive program based upon demonstrated achievement of learning objectives.
 5. Funding a promotional campaign directed at workers, learners and employers, and conducted in collaboration with SREB, emphasizing the importance of skills acquisition, work-ready certification and lifelong learning. Campaign strategies should include distribution of information through non-traditional channels (e.g., grocery stores, day care centers, movie theaters, etc.).
 6. Expanding the use of technology to reach adult learners.

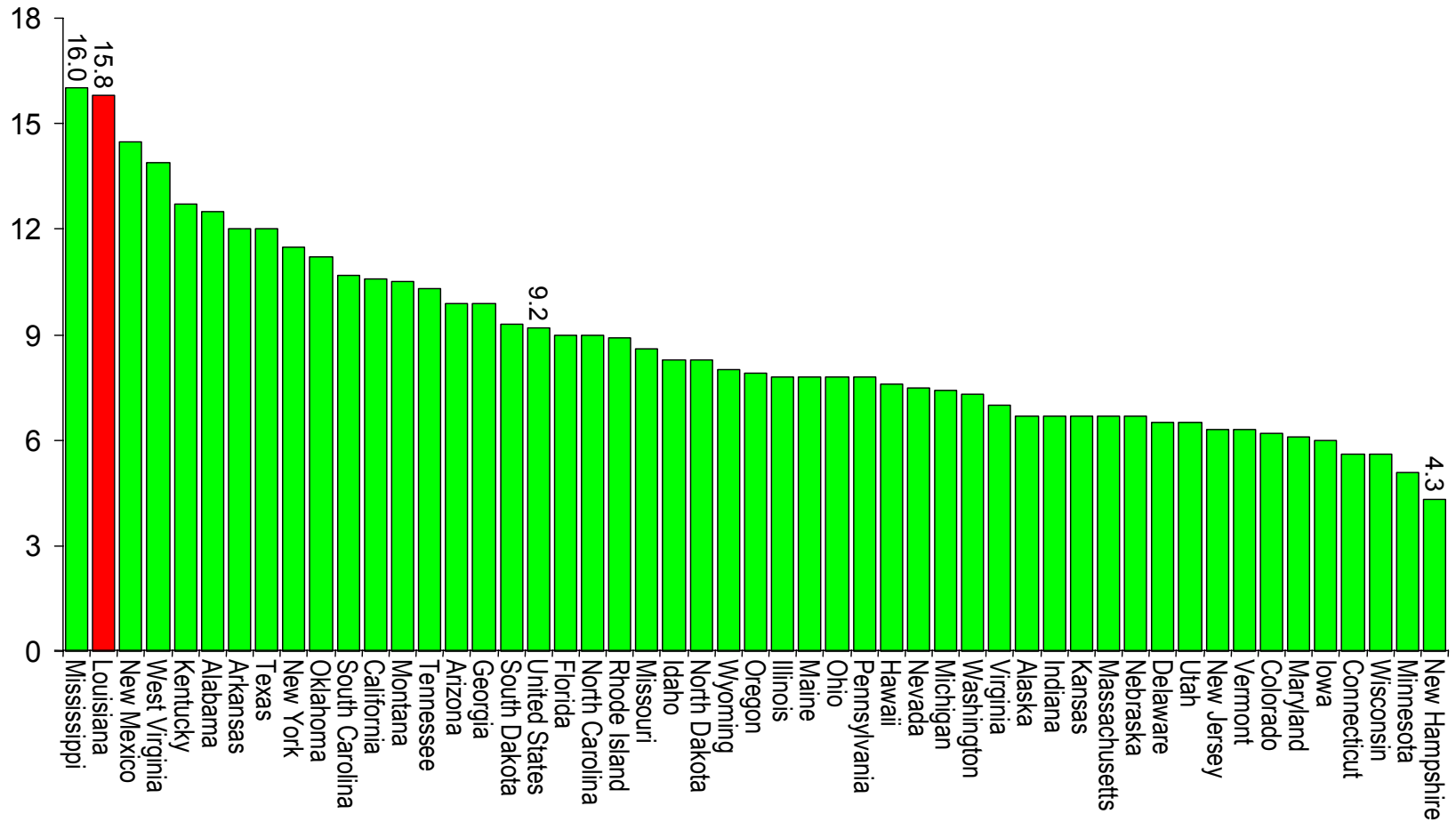
7. Increasing the emphasis on life skills, including those “soft” skills employers deem as critical to success (e.g., communication skills, computer skills, including accessing information online, etc.) through the development of an appropriate course on job readiness and expanded use of Profile XT and other mechanisms which document job fit.
 8. Support programs for preparation of adult education teachers.
- G. Establish a statewide educational “portal” that will highlight adult learning resources and services and make navigating educational access through a single point of entry (“one-stop shop”) easy for Louisiana’s citizens.
 - H. Establish or expand current data collection systems to ensure timely and regular reporting of data against the goals and benchmarks established by the state. As part of the enhanced data collect system, create the capacity to track levels of participation by the private sector.
 - I. Recommit all “partners” in the educational pipeline to design, adjust or amend programs and services to become as “adult friendly” as possible to support the state’s goals.
 - J. Current state policies should be reviewed and amended as needed to remove unintended barriers to adult learners.

APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 1

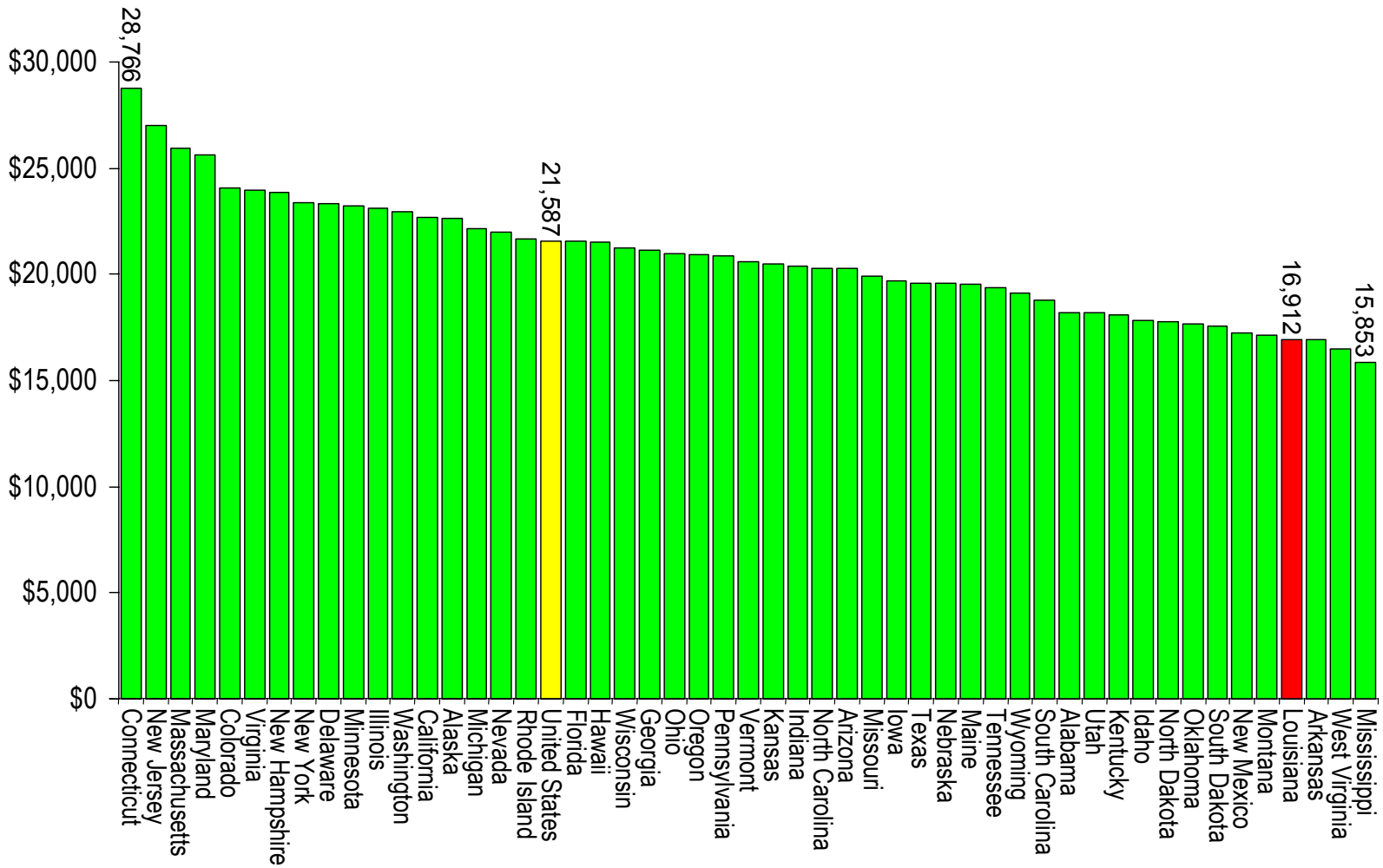
Percent of Families Living in Poverty—Louisiana, 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2

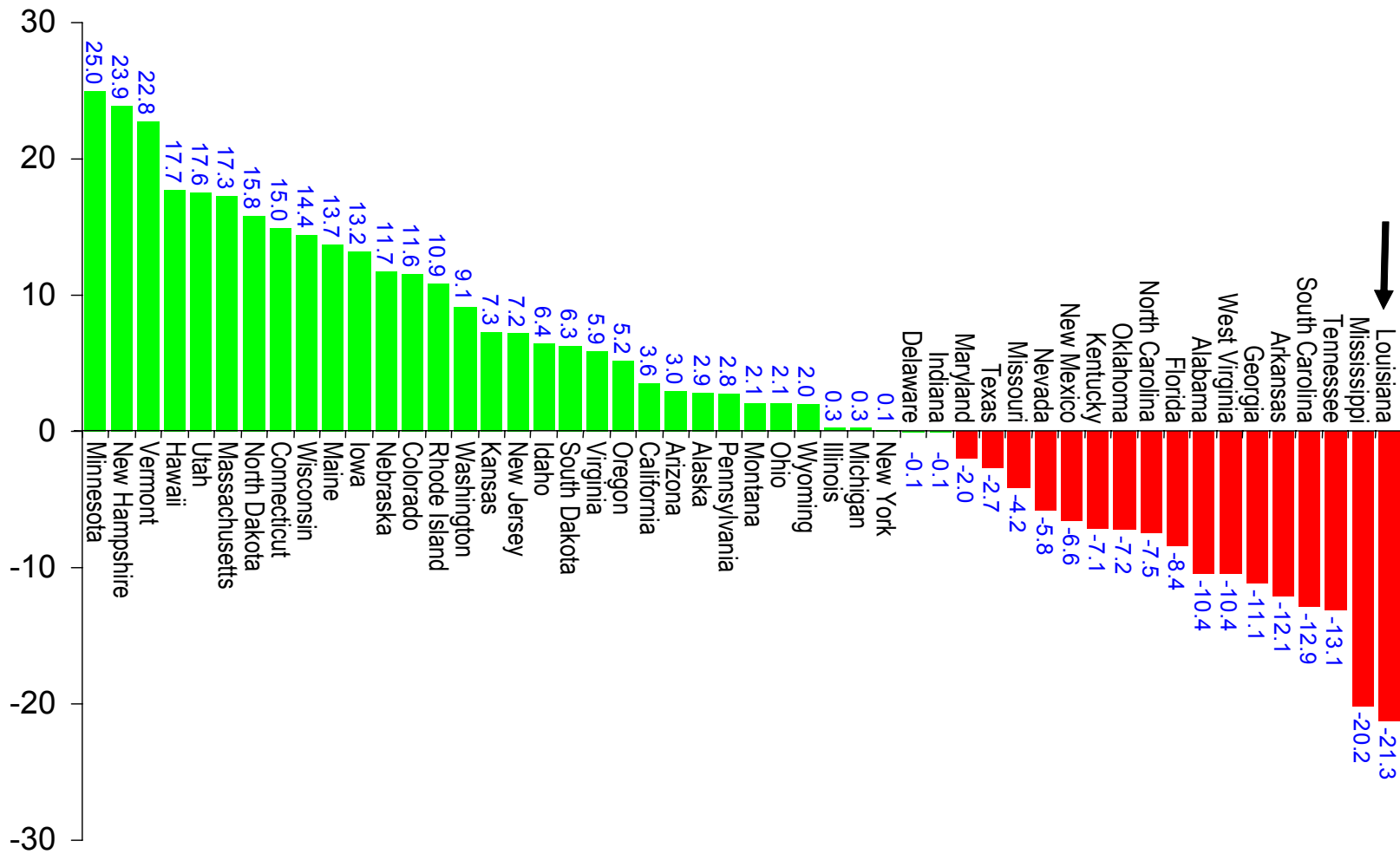
Per Capita Personal Income, 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 3

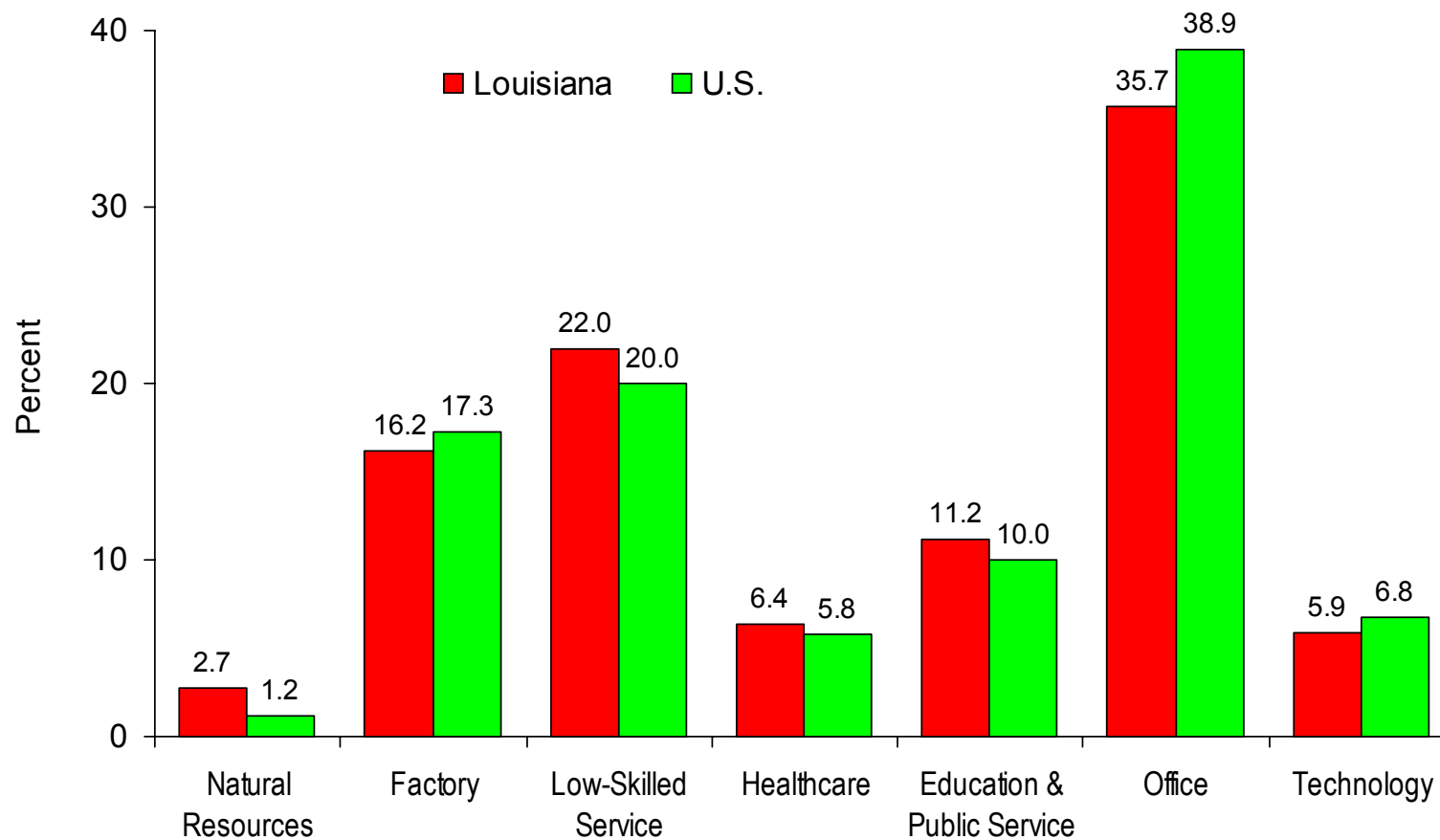
State Health Rankings, 2004



Source: United Health Foundation

Figure 4

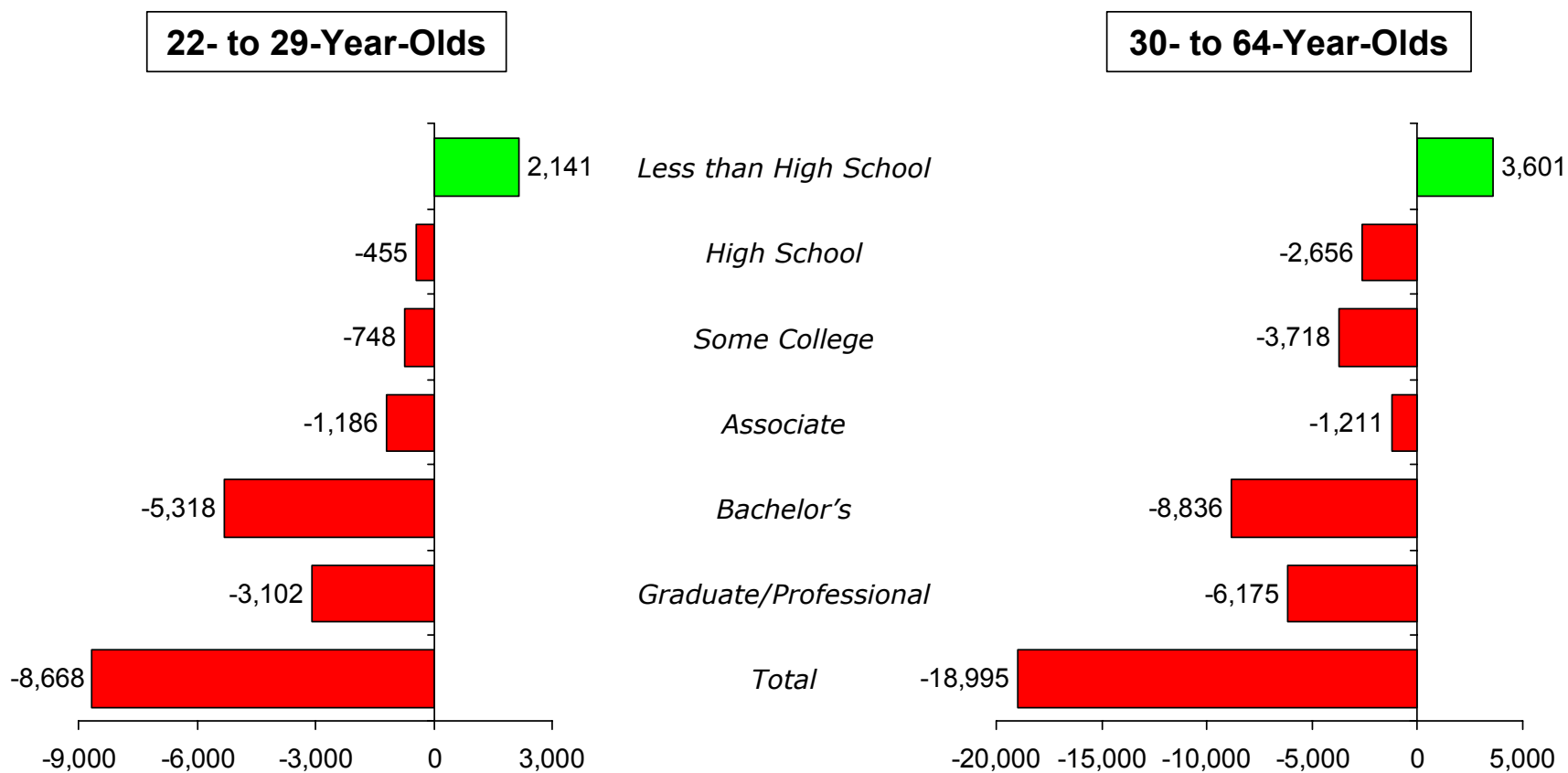
Employment by Job Type—16 and Older, 2000



Source: Tony Carnevale and Donna Desrochers, ETS (PUMS 2000 5% Sample, source data extracted from www.ipums.org at the University of Minnesota)

Figure 5

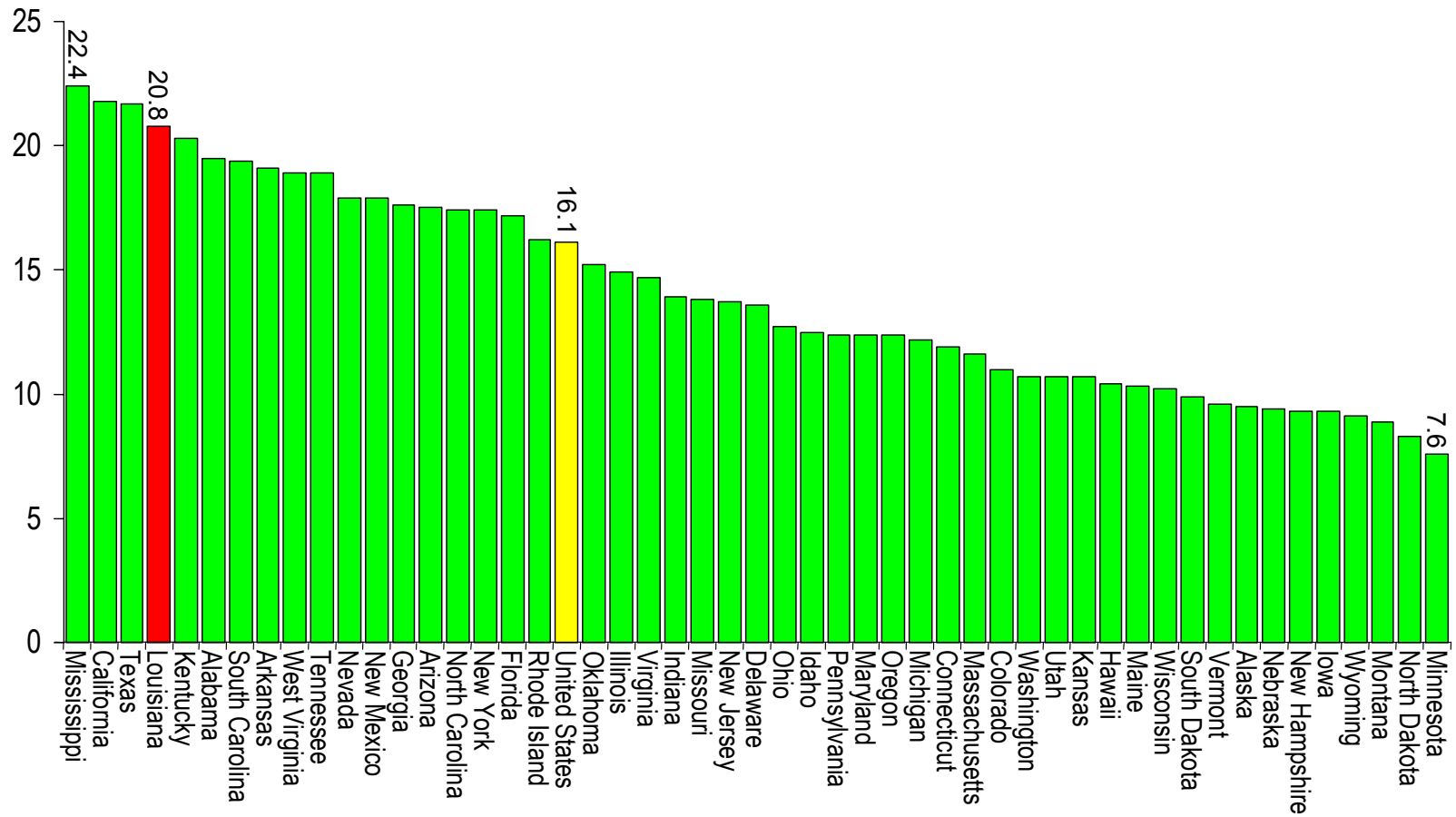
Louisiana Net Migration by Degree Level and Age Group



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census; 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Files

Figure 6

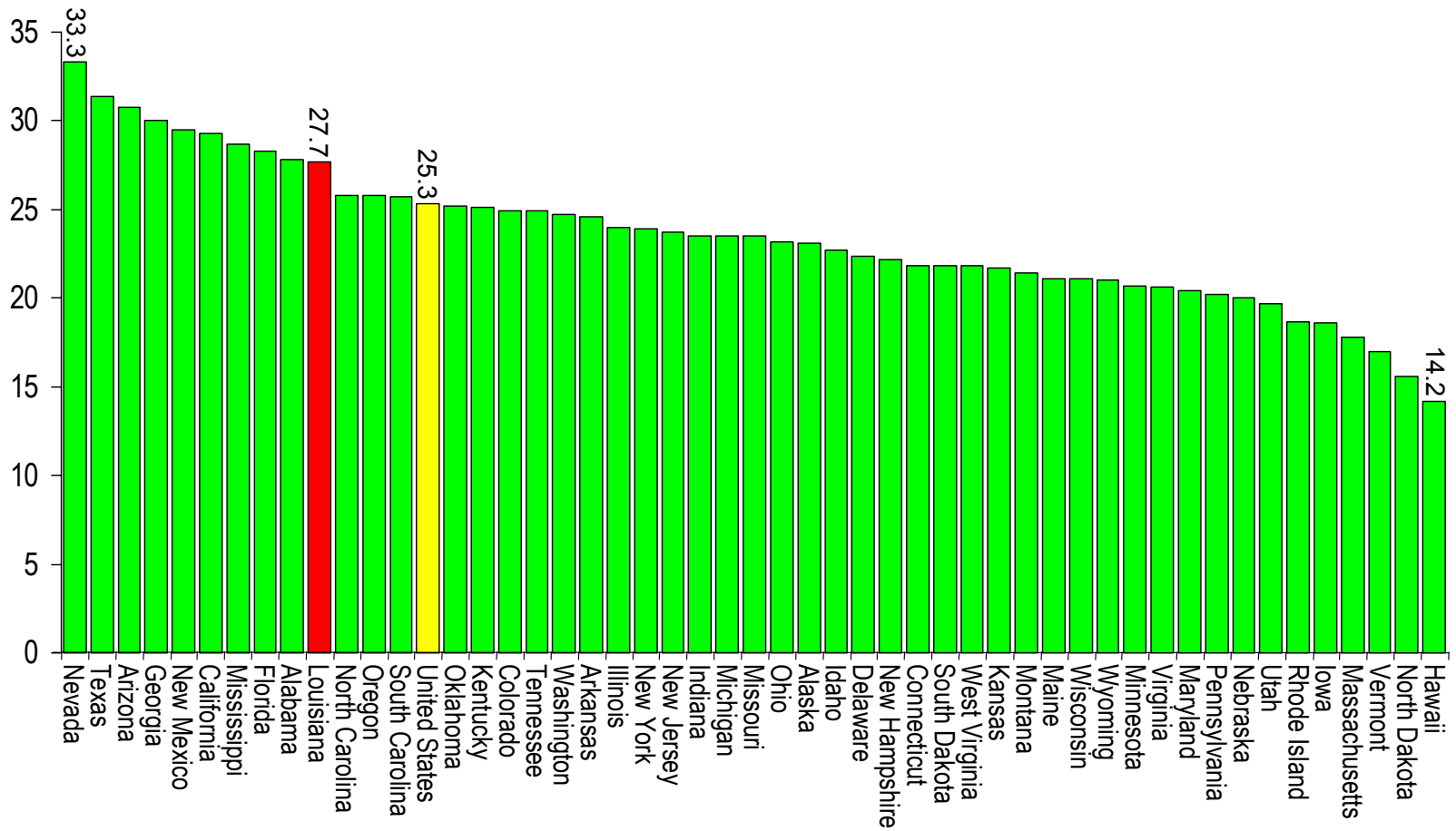
Percent of Population Age 25-64 with Less than a
High School Diploma, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Figure 7

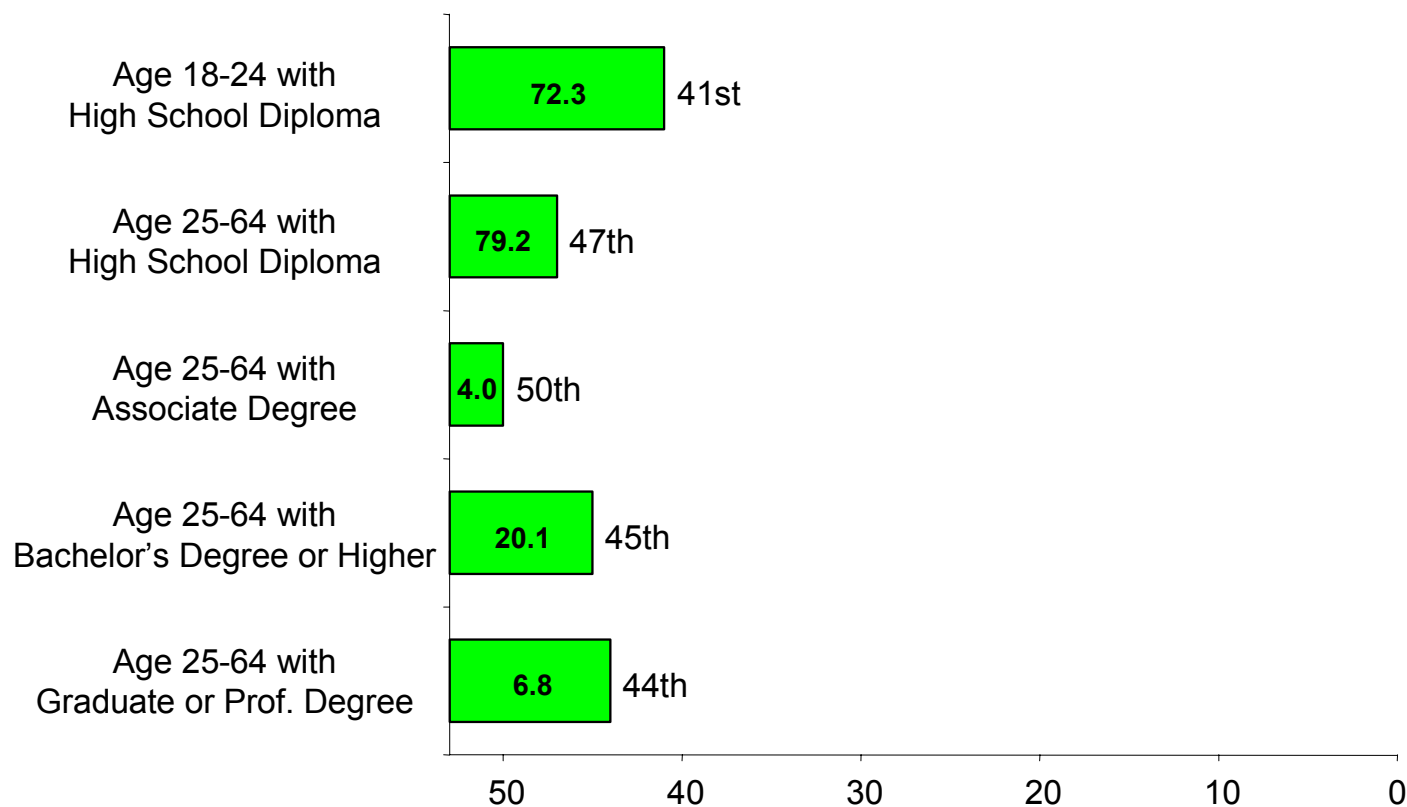
Percent of Population Age 18-24 with
No High School Diploma



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

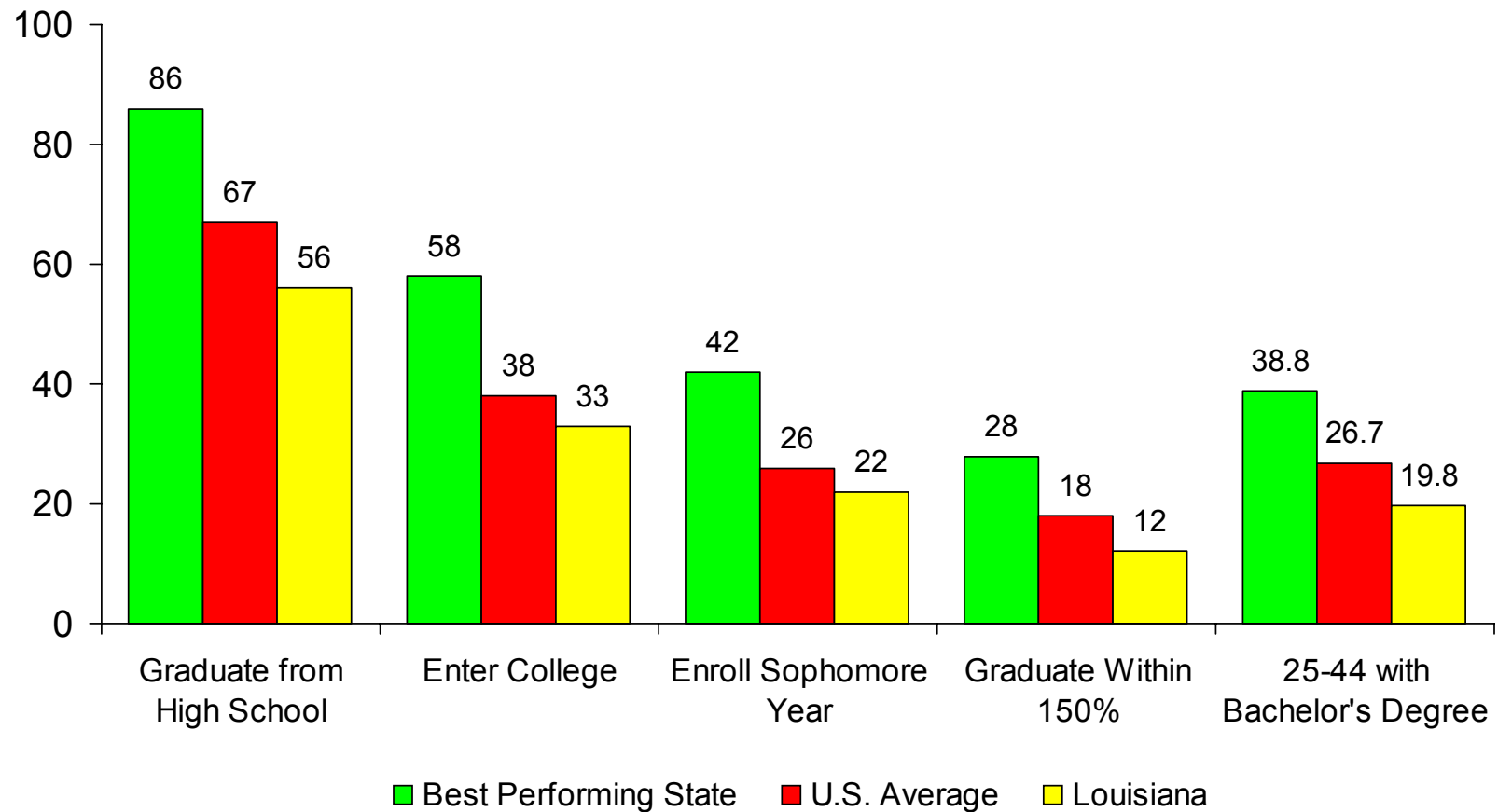
Figure 8

Educational Attainment and Rank Among States Louisiana, 2000 (Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Figure 9
Student Pipeline



Source: NCES, IPEDS 2000 Graduation Rates and Fall 2000 Enrollments. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census. ACT Institutional Survey 2001. Mortenson High School Graduation Rates and College Going Rates.